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For further information, please write to MESDA, Box 10310, Salem Station, Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27108. Telephone (919) 722-6148.

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

JOHN BIVINS, JR., *Chairman*

FRANCES GRIFFIN

BRADFORD RAUSCHENBERG

SALLY GANT

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Figure 1. Henry Laurens (1724-92). John Singleton Copley, 1782. Oil on canvas, 54½ x 40¾. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

Changes in Taste in the Eighteenth Century: A Shift from the Useful to the Ornamental

GEORGE C. ROGERS, JR.

Oliver Goldsmith, in his 1770 poem "The Deserted Village," suffused his message with an attitude toward homely things:

"Imagination fondly stoops to trace
The parlour splendours of that festive place:
The whitewash'd wall, the nicely-sanded floor,
The varnish'd clock that click'd behind the door.
The chest, contrived a double debt to pay,
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day,
The pictures placed for ornament and use,
The twelve good rules, the royal game of goose,
The hearth, except when winter chill'd the day,
With aspen boughs, and flowers, and fennel, gay;
While broken tea-cups, wisely kept for show,
Ranged o'er the chimney, glisten'd in a row."¹

Household furnishings should be plain, clean, and useful, or so the poet implied. Goldsmith's attitude, in fact, was the American attitude of the eighteenth century. But what were the "hastening ills" to which Sweet Auburn was "a prey" that Goldsmith warns us of earlier in the poem? Luxury, idleness, and vice—or conspicuous consumption, to use the words of another man in another age.² In eighteenth-century England the disease was manifested in two ways: in the growth of one large city—London—, and in the emergence in the country of the enormous Whig estate. Americans wished to escape both examples.

In 1948 F. J. Fisher wrote an article for the *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* entitled "The Development of London as a Centre of Conspicuous Consumption in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." By the days of Elizabeth I and James I, London, because it contained the residence of the prince, the courts of justice, and the dwelling places of the great nobles, had become a magnet. To it was drawn the junior branch of the nobility, the country gentry, who first came as schoolboys then as students at the Inns of Court, and as such quickly learned to enjoy the luxuries and vices of the metropolis. Their families soon followed to ape their betters for a portion of each year. James I, disliking their display, drove the gentry home with proclamations, thereby creating a tension which Fisher considered one of the causes of the struggle between crown and commons in the middle of the seventeenth century. During the latter half of that century the leisure institutions of the English ruling class were born: the clubs that met in their favorite taverns, and Hyde Park, which became a parade for gorgeous equipages. Vauxhall and Ranelagh Gardens were eighteenth-century additions.³

It is clear that American fathers abhorred the London life-style and were fearful that their schoolboys and their young men attending the Inns of Court would be corrupted. Henry Laurens removed his sons from school in London in 1772 and escorted them to Geneva, where the influence of John Calvin was still pervasive.⁴ Thomas Heyward, Jr., a future South Carolina signer of the Declaration of Independence, wrote his father from the Middle Temple in London on Feb. 11, 1767: "London is a pleasant place in the winter. All the beau monde or people of quality flock here at the end of Jan. or beginning of Feb. after dissipation at Bath, etc. They spend their time here in as much indolence and luxury as did the Romans at the decline of their empire."⁵

During the eighteenth century the practice of display had moved from the city out into the English countryside. Blenheim Palace was proof that "wealth accumulates, and men decay." As Goldsmith wrote in the "Deserted Village,"

"The rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay,

 The man of wealth and pride
 Takes up a space that many poor supplied;
 Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,

Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds:
The robe that wraps his limbs in silken cloth,
Has robb'd the neighboring fields of half their growth.''⁶

Henry Laurens echoed again and again Goldsmith's lament. He wrote from London on Dec. 17, 1771, to his brother James Laurens in South Carolina: ". . . England will never be a Corn Country again for Exportation, until dire Necessity compels her Children to live more frugally. Amazing Quantities of Corn Land are now inclosed for Parks, Pleasure Gardens, Pastures, for raising Oats for an amazing Increase of Pleasure Horses, . . .'"⁷ On March 2, 1772, Laurens returned to this theme in a letter addressed to Gabriel Manigault: "Vast Quantities of former Corn and Pasture Lands are now inclosed in Parks and Pleasure Gardens.'"⁸

Henry Laurens' description of the Duke de Condé's palace at Chantilly in France revealed a subconscious desire to repudiate such splendors:

"The Duke De Conde's stables & his Riding House are Superb & make an appearance of magnificence equal to his palace. In the stables are 240 English Horses besides French & each well taken care of in his particular Stall with his Name in Capitals & many ornaments and inscriptions within. The Riding House is an Amphitheatre, open atop. The best I have seen anywhere, but the Improvements out of Door neither here nor any where else in France are to compare to those we meet at Noblemen's & Gentlemen's Palaces & Seats in England. I was invited to see the Duke's House & some great improvements in Water-works, but time and my lame Leg obliged me to be content with the description given by others, besides, I have seen and been to see more things of this sort than the Mind can well digest & retain.'"⁹

The attitude of Henry Laurens was American, not European; it was republican, not aristocratic. Land and objects were to be acquired for use rather than for ornament. At least this was the dominant attitude in America at mid-century, and it persisted until the Revolution. There was a tendency already, however, for some of the younger men to bring home a taste for the latest fashions. This counter tendency is apparent in a letter written

from London in 1764 by Barnard Elliott to his brother-in-law Richard Bohun Baker:

“Had I but fifty guineas to spend I would bring over such a collection of Hunting Pieces etc. as would charm you beyond everything but they are printed in oil, and are too dear for me to purchase, the least being priced at ten guineas, but What is that to three hundred, which I saw given the other day for a noble piece of Lord Grosvenor, and his Company with every Dog, Horse, and Servant taken from life on a full chase, where the Stag being closely push’d takes to the River etc. Some fine historical pieces also valued at five hundred guineas but you could have no sort of idea of them without seeing them yourself, for they are beyond description fine!”¹⁰

When Elliott returned to South Carolina and had his portrait painted by Jeremiah Theus he assumed the clothes of a London macaroni, in stark contrast, for example, to the plain velvet suit that Henry Laurens wore when he sat for his famous portrait by John Singleton Copley in 1782.¹¹ There *was* a difference in the attitudes of the generations. The taste of a Barnard Elliott would mature in the 1790’s.

Edmund Morgan has explained in a brilliant article how the non-importation agreements of the 1760’s and 1770’s acted as great works of sumptuary legislation.¹² Christopher Gadsden’s insistence on a plain funeral for his wife in 1768¹³ and Thomas Lynch’s appearance in Carolina homespun on the floor of the Continental Congress in 1774 endorsed the patriotic stance.¹⁴ The American Revolution was fought in part to protect Goldsmith’s “rural virtues”—the life styles of a Laurens and of a Benjamin Franklin. When Benjamin Franklin sought a wedding present for his sister Jane, he decided on a spinning wheel instead of a tea table, concluding that “the character of a good housewife was far preferable to that of being only a pretty gentlewoman.”¹⁵

In November 1786, 100 female residents of Hartford, Connecticut formed a “Patriotic and Economic Association,” promising to dress “in the plainest manner; and encourage industry, frugality, and neatness” while their husbands were devising “other, and more extensive, plans of policy to reform the nation’s political structure.”¹⁶ They realized that their mode of dress should conform to a republican form of government.



Figure 2. Barnard Elliott. Jeremiah Theus. Oil on canvas, 49¾ x 39½. The Carolina Art Association, Gibbes Art Gallery.

This theme may be illustrated with a brief history of porcelain manufacture. After Augustus, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, had won renown for himself and his kingdom by the establishment of a porcelain manufacture at Meissen in 1710, each king and prince attempted to imitate his success. "A porcelain factory," said one German duke, "is an indispensable accompaniment of splendour and magnificence." Only Louis XV at his factory at Sevres was able, however, to equal and even surpass the productions of Meissen. J. H. Plumb has written a sociological study of these kings and princes in his essay, "The

Royal Craze for Porcelain.” “By 1750 all Europe was in the grip of china fever.”¹⁷

There was an attempt in Philadelphia to emulate these European successes as Graham Hood has shown so well in his book, *Bonnin and Morris of Philadelphia, The First American Porcelain Factory, 1770-1772*.¹⁸ Each manufactory depended upon a source of kaolin. Thus there was a continual search for new sources of this clay, and it was this aspect of the porcelain craze that attracted Henry Laurens' attention. More interested in the process than in the final product, he wanted to open a market for Carolina clays. In 1771 he took two kegs of Carolina clay to Philadelphia. Later in the year, after he had arrived in London, he wrote his Carolina neighbor William Williamson:

“I put your Keg of Clay with one of my own into the hands of Mr. George Morris, the Manager of one of the principal Managers of the China Manufactory in Philadelphia, under these different Directions, ‘to make an Essay on each Material, and to inform me of the Quality respectively. My own Clay you are welcome to, tho’ you may if you please send me a dozen Cups and Saucers raised from it. But that Keg WW is the Property of my Friend William Williamson, Esquire in Charles Town, So. Carolina, and must remain in the Gross or wrought up subject to his Order.’ To which Mr. Morris promised to pay due Attention, and before I came from Philadelphia, he acquainted me of a Trial which he had made of each Clay, by which he had proved that they were both very fine, that of mine somewhat finest.”¹⁹

One has the clear impression after reading this paragraph that Henry Laurens would have taken more pride in helping to start a new American industry than in securing the finest china for his tea table. This was the attitude of the older generation, which was essentially the attitude of the eighteenth-century merchant.

Josiah Wedgwood's creation of queensware and jasperware made pottery rival porcelain at half or quarter the price. Wedgwood was the entrepreneur par excellence in salesmanship and marketing techniques, and thus brought the middle classes to his door. He made them want what he produced. In 1774 he put on exhibition in London the Russian service that his factory had produced for Catherine the Great. Wedgwood also wanted his wares to become part of the works of art in the future,

thereby stimulating the itch to collect. He exploited pride in national heroes, writing, "People will give more for *their own Heads*, or the *Heads in fashion*, than for any other subjects, & buy abundantly more of them . . . We should select the proper Heads for the different European Markets."²⁰ That Wedgwood won the next generation of Americans to his way of thinking is evident in Thomas Rhett Smith's letter to John Rutledge, Jr. of June 26, 1790. "I think you must endeavour to appease the Manes of Dr. Franklin for ordering his very venerable head to be set in brass. Nothing less than his bust in Wedgwood can suffice."²¹ Laurens, who had been in London throughout 1774, had never mentioned the exhibition of the Russian service; Thomas Rhett Smith fifteen years later supervised the shipment to John Rutledge, Jr., of candlesticks, candelabras, flower pots, pedestals, all in Wedgwood's blue and white jasper, decorated in the Etruscan style.²²

The key attitude at mid-century was that of the merchant. His job was to gather the finest materials from the ends of the earth and bring them home to be fashioned into objects. Merchants were not collectors, but they did want things made out of the best materials—the precious metals, the most durable stones, the finest woods. There was no built-in obsolescence. This is one of the reasons why eighteenth-century objects have become collectors' items. One exception would be the wax works of Patience Wright, the American artist who transferred her talents and republican enthusiasm to London. Her only surviving work (at least in original form) is the figure of William Pitt.²³ Most eighteenth-century treasures, however, were made of sturdier stuff. The Exchange building in Charleston was built of cypress from the swamp at the head of Ashley River, of bricks from Back River, of stone from Portland in England, and of slate from Wales.²⁴

No one described so well the civilizing effects of the merchant's role than did George Lillo in his play "The London Merchant," first produced in London in 1731 and in Charleston on numerous occasions after its first performance there in 1736. In the following quotation Thorowgood, the merchant, is speaking with Trueman, the good apprentice.

THOROWGOOD.

Methinks I would not have you only learn the method of merchandise and practice it hereafter merely as a means of getting wealth. 'Twill be well worth your pains to

study it as a science, see how it is founded in reason and the nature of things, how it has promoted humanity as it has opened and yet keeps up an intercourse between nations far remote from one another in situation, customs, and religion; promoting arts, industry, peace, and plenty; by mutual benefits diffusing mutual love from pole to pole.

TRUEMAN.

Something of this I have considered, and hope, by your assistance, to extend my thoughts much farther. I have observed those countries where trade is promoted and encouraged do not make discoveries to destroy but to improve mankind—by love and friendship to tame the fierce and polish the most savage; to teach them the advantages of honest traffic by taking from them, with their own consent, their useless superfluities, and giving them in return what, from their ignorance in manual arts, their situation, or some other accident, they stand in need of.

THOROWGOOD.

'Tis justly observed. The populous East, luxuriant, abounds with glittering gems, bright pearls, aromatic spices, and health-restoring drugs. The late-found western world glows with unnumbered veins of gold and silver ore. On every climate and on every country Heaven has bestowed some good peculiar to itself. It is the industrious merchant's business to collect the various blessings of each soil and climate and, with the product of the whole, to enrich his native country.²⁵

Though there was no stone in lowcountry South Carolina, Henry Laurens wanted to construct a sturdy wharf in front of his Charleston home. On each journey that he made outside London he made enquiries about the stone of the neighborhood. At the very end of his stay in England he decided to order some stone from Aberdeen. He wanted 148 tons "proper for making the Heads of Quays or Wharves, . . ." He wrote on Oct. 6, 1774: "The Stones which I want most, are large, of about 5 or 6 feet long, 3 feet broad, and 2 or 3 feet deep, to be wrought smooth on two faces, and each End, for the convenience of laying closely . . . Can a Ship be procured to transport such Stones from Aberdeen to So. Carolina, . . ." And he cautioned "that a Ship for that Country ought not to draw

above fourteen or at most fifteen feet Water when fully loaden?"²⁶ Laurens looked at windmills and water works and hoes and fish nets and flat-bottomed boats, but he scarcely had a reference in his correspondence to china or silver or paintings.²⁷ The only picture that he brought home from this trip was an engraving printed in London in 1774 by John Bowles depicting a rider, representing England, who had fallen off his horse on the road between Boston and Salem.²⁸ The political message was more important than the art form.

Laurens was something of a collector, not necessarily for himself. His friends who were naturalists had owned cabinets of curiosities, following the custom of the day. For Theodore Gronovius of Leyden he obtained some "Indian Trinkets" — 1 quiver containing 22 arrows, 1 scalping knife and sheath, 1 otter skin in the form of a pouch in which the Indians usually carried pipe tobacco—as well as objects from Africa—5 leopard skins, Negro earrings, and 10 feet of the small African deer.²⁹ For Edward Bridgen there was "a Collection of Snakes preserved in Rum."³⁰ The result that followed from helping his friends obtain these curiosities was an increase in general knowledge.

Laurens did, of course, have his share of vanity. He wanted to be remembered by posterity, and after his release from the Tower of London on December 31, 1781, he had his portrait painted by John Singleton Copley. This portrait is a full view of Laurens seated in a chair, with a table to his right upon which rest two notable state papers, the Articles of Confederation and the 1778 Treaty of Alliance with France. These documents had been drawn and signed while Laurens was president of the Congress.³¹

Laurens even may have influenced John Adams, a man wracked by conflicting feelings of vanity and modesty, to sit for Copley. Both Laurens and Adams rented rooms in the fall of 1783 from John Stockdale, the Piccadilly printer and bookseller.³² Copley's work was the only full-length portrait that was ever painted of John Adams, "... showing him posing aristocratically in a full-length view with a scroll in his hand, perhaps the Treaty of Paris. Before him on the table lies a map of America, and at his feet the world, in the form of a globe." Abigail Adams described the female figure in the distance as "representing Innocence, and Peace." In a more modest mood, John Adams later confessed that he was somewhat embarrassed by this "Piece of Vanity." In 1793, when

John Stockdale proposed to have the Copley portrait engraved for the frontispiece to Stockdale's new edition of Adams' *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, Adams remarked: "I should be much mortified to see such a Bijou affixed to those Republican Volumes." How difficult it was for those republicans to suppress their feelings of satisfaction and self-congratulation!³³

The history of coachmaking provides another overlay which highlights our theme even more. The State Coach made for the coronation of George III in 1761 was the most ornate of golden coaches. Did the Carolinians yearn for such magnificence? Peter Manigault wrote to London on July 7, 1766, to order "A light Coach," to be "lined with blue English Leather, the Cloth on the Coach Box blue trimmed with Yellow. But little carved work, plain & neat as possible. Springs before & behind, painted fashionably but not gaudy."³⁴ A 1767 bill presented by a painter and gilder to the Charleston coachmaking firm of Hawes and Rogers contained charges for painting Thomas Lynch's chariot and for the two books of gold leaf that had been used. There was also a charge in this bill for painting and gilding Mr. Huger's chariot.³⁵ In 1772 Henry Laurens assembled many items with the help of "one of the most eminent Coach Builders" in London to be shipped to Mathias Hutchinson, Charleston chaise-maker. Hutchinson advertised on July 28, 1772, that he had just imported green and blue caffoys, green, blue, and light-colored cloths with livery lace suitable for each, and Wilton carpeting for the chaise bottoms.³⁶ Thus chairs, chaises, chariots, and light coaches were being built and used in Charleston prior to the Revolution.

By the 1790's more elaborate vehicles were being ordered from England and Philadelphia. Three families directly associated with the making of the new U.S. Constitution were acquiring coaches and matching horses. In 1787, when John Jay could not find in New York horses correct in size and color for Edward Rutledge's "very high English built coach," he sent his own carriage horses to South Carolina.³⁷ On March 18, 1791, Henry Laurens sent directions to William Bell of Philadelphia for "a Post Chariot" for his daughter, "the Governor's Lady."³⁸ His daughter Mary Eleanor had married Charles Pinckney, then governor of South Carolina. Henry Laurens, Jr., on the eve of his marriage to the daughter of John Rutledge, ordered a coach from Philadelphia in a letter of Feb. 23, 1792,

to William Bell:

I wish to have put in hand for me immediately upon Receipt of this Letter by the best Coach-builder in your City, a Coach, of which the following is a Description.

It must be large, capable of containing four persons conveniently.

The Quarters open with fine Glasses & Venetian Spring Blinds—two ample glasses before & behind, which also must have Blinds of the same sort.

The Lining of fine white broad Cloth, with a neat false Lining.

Large handsome globe Lamps.

The Colour, *couleur de puce* of the most splendid Sort without any painted border or other ornament of that sort, but a plated moulding all round with suitable Brackets (which I think is the term for those parts which bind the Roof & the sides together).

The Carriage part a perch (not crane-necked) & painted of a handsome bright yellow.

The Box not too lofty & fixed upon a Boot of moderate size.

The Leather of the Boot & the Body Japanned, or varnished, I do not know which is the more proper term.

Two hammer Cloths one a very elegant one, the other plain for common use. Or, if you approve it, an oil cloth to cover the best hammer Cloth in lieu of the plain one.

The Carriage to be made as easy as possible & as light as is consistent with safety.

Hung at that heighth that double Steps would be sufficient to ascend it. But let the steps be treble, for greater ease.

A single L upon each Door pannel. As there will be no other ornament except this L, It should be made large & if you can have it executed in your City, enameled so as to suit the Colors of the carriage. It must be of plate or plated & screwed on by small neat screws upon the center of the pannel.

The fellows of the Wheels broad, something in the Stile, if you recollect them, of my father's little Phaeton. The reason of this the carriage rolls, having such Wheels, over our Sandy Streets & sinks not so much into them . . .

I would have something very handsome, elegant & rich without either tawdriness or flash, of the newest taste without any of the extravagance of the fashion. The Cost you will regulate, on this head I have only to say without meaning to limit you in the smallest Degree in your agreement, that I certainly would be glad to have the work done on the best terms. The Amount of Cost you will please to place to my father's Account. I do not know who is the best Builder of Carriages in your City. I have heard of Simons & of Hunter. The latter I believe built a Coach for Mr. [John] Rutledge, but you will be able to find out who is at the head of his trade, & him I would have employed . . .

I shall be obliged to you to make Enquiries & inform me for how much, Pennsylvania Currency, I can import into this Country a sett of handsome able Coach Horses, of the largest size say 16 hands high, including all Charges. It is not improbable if you consent to take the trouble for me I may request your interference in this matter hereafter.³⁹

Were these families, the Rutledges, the Pinckneys, and the Laurenses, by ordering such large and elegant coaches betraying their republican ideal? Were they as Francis Kinloch wrote in 1788 "*getting back fast to the system we destroyed some years ago?*"⁴⁰

There was thus an obvious change in attitude toward the applied or decorative arts taking place by the end of the 1780's. The shift—which, of course, was gradual and, I presume, against their better nature—was from "use" to "ornament." At this juncture in the development of the American society we would expect the appearance of the collector, the collector of antiques. The *Oxford English Dictionary* may help us here. What does the history of the word "antique" reveal? Under the definition "a relic of by-gone days," Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, 1766, is cited. Goldsmith was describing the business of a man in Paris who was there to "collect pictures, medals, intaglios, and antiques of all kinds, for a gentleman in London who had just stepped into taste and a large fortune."⁴¹ Under the definition "after the manner of the ancients of Greece and Rome," Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, 1819, is cited:

"And thus they form a group that's quite antique,
Half naked, loving, natural, and Greek."



Figure 3. Ralph Izard on His Tour, after a painting of The Cricketeers, by Benjamin West, 1763. Unknown artist. Oil on canvas, 40 x 31. Private Collection. MESDA research file S-9053.

The words “antiques” and “antique” were getting great play, therefore, between 1766 and 1819. This was due to the impact that the discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum had made upon the western mind. Among the first Americans, if not the very first, to see those ruins had been Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Izard who visited the excavations with John Singleton Copley in January 1775. Izard wrote from Naples on Jan. 21, 1775: “I have met with nothing that seems so extraordinary to me as the neighborhood of this place. It is almost incredible, that two such

towns as Pompeii and Herculaneum, should have lain buried under ground, undiscovered, for near one thousand seven hundred years . . . The beautiful pieces of antiquity in bronze, that have been found in them, surpasses all imagination."⁴² Upon their return to Rome, Copley painted his famous portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Izard. The classical material in the background—the vase, the Orestes and Electra marble group, and the coliseum—reflect the influence of the pilgrimage to the ancient ruins.⁴³

Izard's enthusiasms undoubtedly influenced a young Charlestonian who was to become the first art collector in South Carolina, and perhaps in the United States. Joseph Allen Smith (1769-1828), whose older brother had married a daughter of Ralph Izard in 1786, traveled in Italy in the 1790's with Lord Wycombe, the son of the Earl of Shelburne. Shelburne had been trying for three decades to make his collection of antiquities the greatest in the world. The two young men had letters of introduction to Sir William Hamilton, the English minister at Naples. Smith took advantage of his opportunities to collect old masters, landscapes (particularly those of Salvator Rosa), gems, metals, intaglios, etc. and then stored them in Italy while he continued his European travels. Smith was abroad from 1793 to 1807 and was the first American to travel extensively throughout the Russian empire. On his return to America he gave "a collection of impressions of Gems & Medals some valuable Books of Engravings and Several Casts from Ancient Statues" to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. In 1808 he was elected an honorary member of that society, thereby joining an illustrious group consisting of Robert Fulton, Bushrod Washington, Antonio Canova, Gilbert Stuart, John Trumbull, and Benjamin Latrobe. Since Smith was neither an engineer, nor a sculptor, nor a painter, he had obviously been honored as a collector. No evidence has been found that Smith ever worked a day in his life. He lived on inherited wealth and the property of his wife, who was the youngest daughter of Ralph Izard. He was a man of leisure, a type that Americans had not known before.⁴⁴

We examine, then, the tastes of two distinct groups: an older generation dedicated to the useful, and a younger generation susceptible to the attractions of the ornamental. By 1790 these were conflicting emotions even in the breasts of such rational men as Henry Laurens and John Adams. How could these conflicting emotions be reconciled? The answer lies in the



Figure 4. Sketch of an Unknown Charleston Gentleman, *early nineteenth century*. Charles Fraser. *Watercolor on paper*, 5 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{16}$. Charleston Museum.

fact that these feelings were reconciled in the concept of the rural retreat. The rural retreat was not the seat of an aristocrat, but of a true republican. The Adams house in Quincy, the Washington home at Mount Vernon, the Jefferson home at Monticello, the Laurens home at Mepkin, and the Izard home at The Elms—these country places were vastly different from

Blenheim, Chatsworth, Badminton, Castle Howard, Holkham Hall, Chantilly, and other similar English seats. The differences were clearly understood by the masters of these American retreats. Today our untrained democratic eyes may lump them all together as the stately homes of England and America, but we should not be guilty of such a distorted perception.

As an illustration, it is useful to examine a brief history of landscape gardening. In the eighteenth century there were two schools of thought on how to design a garden. One school stemmed from the work of André Le Notre at Versailles. It was Joseph Addison who, in a famous essay in the *Spectator*, June 25, 1712, first formulated another school, a more natural school of gardening. Addison wrote: "why may not a whole estate be thrown into a kind of garden by frequent plantations, that may turn as much to the profit, as the pleasure of the owner?"⁴⁵ Alexander Pope's home at Twickenham on the Thames was the first good example of the new style. Twickenham, as a recent article on Pope as a landscape gardener tells us, was "an ideal of retirement, virtue, temperance, contentment, simplicity and home-bred self-sufficiency. It was 'his own ground,' and the place from which, literally and figuratively, he could stand with some measure of moral security as he launched his satirical attacks upon St. Stephen's Palace and the Royal Exchange a few miles down the river."⁴⁶ Pope taught his countrymen that a "plantation adorned" provides us with "moral security" which in turn enhances political security. In this way gardening could even have a political thrust.

The ultimate perfection of this concept, however, was the small farm of the poet William Shenstone, who called his retreat The Leasowes. Shenstone wrote an "Ode to Rural Elegance." According to his biographer, The Leasowes was representative of the stage "when, having disposed of the sumptuousness of Versailles, and not having reached the freedom of the Romantic Revival, the garden could assume a character truly consistent with the well-bred Virgilian rusticity which its gentlemen cultivators so elegantly embodied in themselves." The Leasowes was the *ferme ornée*.⁴⁷

In 1786 Thomas Jefferson traveled to London from Paris to pay a visit to John Adams, and the two American ministers made a tour of English country seats that spring. John Adams recorded his impressions in his diary:

The Gentlemens Seats were the highest Entertainment, We met with, Stowe, Hagley and Blenheim, are superb. Woburn, Caversham and the Leasowes are beautifull. Wotton is both great and elegant tho neglected. Architecture, Painting, Statuary, Poetry are all employed in the Embellishment of these Residences of Greatness and Luxury. A national Debt of 274 millions sterling accumulated by Jobs, Contracts, Salaries and Pensions in the Course of a Century might easily produce all this Magnificence. The Pillars, Obelisks &c. erected in honour of Kings, Queens and Princesses, might procure the means. The Temples to Bacchus and Venus, are quite unnecessary as Mankind have no need of artificial Incitements, to such Amuzements. The Temples of ancient Virtue, of the British Worthies, of Friendship, of Concord and Victory, are in a higher Taste. I mounted Ld. Cobhams Pillar 120 feet high, with pleasure, as his Lordships Name was familiar to me, from Popes Works.

Ld. Littletons Seat interested me, from a recollection of his Works, as well as the Grandeur and Beauty of the Scaenes. Popes Pavillion and Thompsons [Thomson's] Seat, made the Excursion poetical. Shenstones Leasowes is the simplest and plainest, but the most rural of all. I saw no Spot so small, that exhibited such a Variety of Beauties.

It will be long, I hope before Ridings, Parks, Pleasure Grounds, Gardens and ornamented Farms grow so much in Fashion in America. But Nature has done greater Things and furnished nobler Materials there. The Oceans, Islands, Rivers, Mountains, Valleys are all laid out upon a larger Scale. — If any Man should hereafter arise, to embellish the rugged Grandeur of Pens Hill, he might make some thing to boast of, although there are many Situations capable of better Improvement.⁴⁸

In 1771 Alicia Hopton, wanting to transform her father's Wando River plantation (it was known by the name of Starve-gut plantation), wrote to her friend John Laurens and asked him to send her "a plan of a Rural retreat." He had recently written and promised to send her some of his own sketches, including one that he intended to execute of Twickenham. She replied:

“Indeed Mr. Laurens, you cou’d not have made me a more acceptable present than the Picture you mention, its being your performance wou’d make it esteem’d by me let it Represent what place it wou’d. Its being the Sweet Retreat of my dear Mr. Pope will make me almost adore it.”⁴⁹ Thus this enthusiasm for Twickenham and The Leasowes was shared by the members of the Carolina country gentry.



Figure 5. “WOODVILLE the Seat of R. Beresford. Esquire.” from the sketchbook of Charles Fraser, c. 1810. Watercolor on paper, 4 $\frac{7}{16}$ x 7 $\frac{3}{16}$. Private Collection. MESDA research file S-8192.

A study of the country retreat is badly needed, not a study of the distant plantation or the town house, but the rural retreat which might be called a “suburban villa.” These retreats dotted the Neck above the city of Charleston, they lined the Ashley River, and they were sprinkled over the neighboring sea islands. The sketchbooks of Charles Fraser help us to identify them.⁵⁰ To such places men like Joseph Allen Smith brought back their treasures. Perhaps Smith purchased the series of panels telling the story of Pan in order to provide a model for an ornamental frieze in such a villa.

The letters of Mrs. Gabriel Manigault, who divided her time each year between residences on the banks of the Schuylkill and Goose Creek, as well as a mansion on the outskirts of Charleston, reveal the way in which this American life-style had jelled by the opening decade of the nineteenth century. She was the daughter of Ralph Izard and Alice DeLancey Izard, and the sister-in-law of Joseph Allen Smith. When William Loughton Smith, Joseph’s older brother, returned to Charleston in 1804 with his collection of art, he displayed it in Gabriel Manigault’s

home. Margaret Manigault listed for her mother "statues of Cupid and Psyche, Bacchus and Ariadne, the Apollo Belvedere, the three Graces, as well as busts of Bonaparte, Jefferson, and himself [Mr. Smith], two prints of Claude Lorraine paintings, three Canaletto views of Venice, and three pictures by a disciple of Vernet, one a magnificent view of Vesuvius."⁵¹

When Joseph Allen Smith arrived home in 1807, he carried most of his treasures to Pennsylvania. Mrs. Manigault wrote to her mother on December 20, 1807, from Philadelphia:

Mr. Smith's memory is astonishing—what a variety of facts perfectly arranged, and clearly narrated! What a rich fund of interesting and original anecdotes! With such opportunities, & such advantages as he has had, how fortunate to have united the inclination to profit, and the power of imparting and transmitting his knowledge, and observations. I hope that he feels as much pleasure in communicating his information as we do in listening to it. He appears to me to have hit the happy medium between a boasting desire to display his talents and his acquirements—and a cold, repulsive reserve—he is a delightful acquisition to society—and I hear him with sincere pleasure say that he was partial to the banks of the Skuyllkill . . ."⁵²

Yet Mr. Smith, whom we have already described as almost a breed apart, found it very difficult to settle down in these republican retreats. On May 7, 1811, Mrs. Manigault wrote Mrs. Izard that "Mr. Smith was in high good humour, and spoke favorably of America—and was not *too* angry with me when I reprobated the idea of considering her as a frightful savage."⁵³ Although Joseph Allen Smith probably never felt at home again in America, Mrs. Manigault, a much more representative figure, certainly did. We see an air of total satisfaction in her description of a ball in Charleston in 1809 in the home of her neighbor Mrs. Thomas Radcliffe:

Mrs. Radcliffe's ball . . . was really a splendid and well conducted affair. The house was well lighted . . . The stair case is very pretty, and the passage above remarkably large and well finished. It was . . . ornamented with festoons of flowers, & flower pots from her green house shedding fragrant odours. The drawing room

retained its carpet and card tables were ready to accommodate those who did not prefer dancing . . . Hers was a complete Ball—for it concluded with a magnificent supper at which near eighty persons were seated. The centre of it was adorned with an accumulation of iced plumb cakes in a kind of bower of natural flowers which gave the whole a very gay appearance—the table was loaded with every dainty that could be thought of, & every precaution was taken for the accommodation of so large a party.⁵⁴

During the last fifty years of the eighteenth century a shift in acquisition habits occurred in America, from seeking objects that served a useful purpose to those that might on occasion serve a purely ornamental purpose. Yet even admitting this tendency, the plain style of a Peter Manigault still predominated, a style which had set America off from England. Manigault wrote Benjamin Stead on April 2, 1771: "Having at last built myself a good House after having lived Sixteen Years in a very bad one I stand in need of some Plate & Furniture of which I inclose you a List. I have fixed the Prices of the different Articles, but shall not mind your being a little under or over the Mark. I will be glad to have them out as soon as possible & the plainer the better so that they are fashionable."⁵⁵ This plain style had been eroded by the end of the century by the new men of leisure, but there was never an attempt to reproduce the gorgeousness of a Versailles. Those styles have been left in Europe and in the past.

Dr. Rogers is the Caroline McKissick Dial Professor of History at the University of South Carolina. The subject which he treats here was first presented as a paper at the 1981 Antiques Forum held at Colonial Williamsburg.

FOOTNOTES

1. Oliver Goldsmith, "The Deserted Village."
2. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1934), pp. 68-101.
3. F. J. Fisher, "The Development of London as a Centre of Conspicuous Consumption in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Essays in Economic History*, ed. E. M. Carus-Wilson (3 vols.: London, 1962), II, 197-207.
4. See Volume VIII (1771-1773), passim of *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, ed. Philip M. Hamer, George C. Rogers, Jr., and David R. Chesnutt (9 vols. thus far: Columbia, S.C., 1968-1981). Hereinafter cited as *HL Papers*.
5. Thomas Heyward, Jr. to Daniel Heyward, Feb. 11, 1767, Emmet Collection, New York Historical Society.
6. Oliver Goldsmith, "The Deserted Village."
7. Henry Laurens to James Laurens, Dec. 12, 1771, *HL Papers*, VIII, 95.
8. Henry Laurens to Gabriel Manigault, March 2, 1772, *HL Papers*, VIII, 207.
9. Travel Journal, April 25, 1773, *HL Papers*, IX, 17.
10. Barnard Elliott to Richard Bohun Baker, 1764, quoted in Anna Wells Rutledge, *Artists in the Life of Charleston* (Reprint edition: Columbia, S.C., 1980), 116.
11. Margaret Simons Middleton, *Jeremiah Theus, Colonial Artist of Charles Town* (Columbia, S.C., 1953), pp. 66-67; Jules David Prown, *John Singleton Copley* (2 vols.: Cambridge, Mass., 1966), Figure 416.
12. Edmund S. Morgan, "The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, XXIV (1967), 3-43.
13. See footnote on funeral customs in *HL Papers*, II, 4.
14. Silas Deane to Elizabeth Deane, Sept. 7, 1774, *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, ed. Paul H. Smith (7 vols. thus far: Washington, D.C., 1976-), I, 34.
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16. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
17. See "The Royal Porcelain Craze" in J. H. Plumb, *In the Light of History* (London, 1972), pp. 57-69.
18. Graham Hood, *Bonnin and Morris of Philadelphia: The First American Porcelain Factory, 1770-1772* (Williamsburg, Va., 1972).
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20. N. McKendrick, "Josiah Wedgwood: An Eighteenth-Century Entrepreneur in Salesmanship and Marketing Technique," *Essays in Economic History*, ed. E. M. Carus-Wilson (3 vols.: London, 1962), III, 367, 375.
21. Thomas Rhett Smith to John Rutledge, Jr., June 26, 1790, John Rutledge, Jr. Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, N.C.

22. *Ibid.*
23. Charles Coleman Sellers, *Patience Wright, American Artist and Spy in George III's London* (Middletown, Conn., 1976), p. 72.
24. Commissioner for Building an Exchange and Work House, April 18, 1767, *HL Papers*, V, 240-241.
25. George Lillo, *The London Merchant*, ed. William H. McBurney (Lincoln, Neb., 1965), p. 4.
26. Henry Laurens to George or William Forbes, Oct. 6, 1774, *HL Papers*, IX, 586-587.
27. For windmills, see *HL Papers*, VIII, 226, IX, 545; for water works, see *HL Papers*, VIII, 215, 221-222; for hoes, see *HL Papers*, IX, 35-36, 206; for fish nets, see *HL Papers*, IX, 498, 537; for flat-bottomed boats, see *HL Papers*, IX, 498, 541, 555.
28. Henry Laurens to John Laurens, Oct. 31, 1774, *HL Papers*, IX, 612. This mezzotint has been used as the frontispiece for this Volume IX.
29. James Laurens to Henry Laurens, June 7, 29, 1773, Henry Laurens to Laurens Theodore Gronovius, Oct. 29, 1774, *HL Papers*, IX, 75, 85, 607-608.
30. Henry Laurens to John Lewis Gervais, April 9, 1774, *HL Papers*, IX, 394.
31. This portrait is used as the frontispiece of Volume I of *HL Papers*. The original hangs in the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
32. Henry Laurens to John Stockdale, April 20, 1787, Laurens Papers, South Carolina Historical Society.
33. Andrew Oliver, *Portraits of John and Abigail Adams* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 23-25.
34. Peter Manigault to Thomas Gadsden, July 7, 1766, Letter Book of Peter Manigault, Oct. 20, 1763-May 3, 1773, South Carolina Historical Society.
35. Judgment Rolls, 1768, No. 492A, S.C. Archives.
36. Henry Laurens to Mathias Hutchinson, April 14, 1772, *HL Papers*, VIII, 266-267.
37. George C. Rogers, Jr., *Evolution of a Federalist, William Loughton Smith of Charleston (1758-1812)* (Columbia, S.C., 1962), p. 142. Hereinafter cited as Rogers, *Evolution of a Federalist*.
38. Henry Laurens to William Bell, March 18, 1791, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.
39. Henry Laurens, Jr., to William Bell, Feb. 23, 1792, *HL Papers*, South Carolina Historical Society.
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41. Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (London, 1766), p. 105.
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43. Margaret Simons Middleton, *Jeremiah Theus, Colonial Artist of Charles Town* (Columbia, S.C., 1953), pp. 66-67; Jules David Prown, *John Singleton Copley* (2 vols.: Cambridge, Mass., 1966), Figure 342.

44. George C. Rogers, Jr., "Preliminary Thoughts on Joseph Allen Smith as the United States' First Art Collector," *"Art in the Lives of South Carolinians, Nineteenth Century Chapters*, ed. David Moltke-Hansen (2 vols.: Charleston, S.C., 1979), II, GR 1-12.
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48. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. L. H. Butterfield (4 vols.: Cambridge, Mass., 1962), III, 185-186.
49. Alicia Hopton to John Laurens, June 17, 1771, William Gilmore Simms Collection of Laurens Papers, formerly in the Long Island Historical Society, now in the Kendall Whaling Museum, Sharon, Mass.
50. Charles Fraser, *A Charleston Sketchbook, 1796-1806* (Columbia, S.C., 1971).
51. Quoted in Rogers, *Evolution of a Federalist*, p. 356.
52. Margaret Manigault to Alice Izard, Dec. 20, 1807, Izard Papers, Library of Congress.
53. Margaret Manigault to Alice Izard, May 7, 1811, Izard Papers, Library of Congress.
54. Margaret Manigault to Alice Izard, Feb. 19, 1809, quoted in Rogers, *Evolution of a Federalist*, p. 383.
55. Letter Book of Peter Manigault, Oct. 20, 1763-May 3, 1773, South Carolina Historical Society.



Figure 1. Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bull, 1747, signed by Arthur Devis, oil on canvas, 42 x 34. Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

The Fashion for Carpets in South Carolina, 1736-1820

AUDREY MICHIE

In 1739, Robert Pringle, merchant of Charleston, South Carolina, wrote to one of his correspondents in Frederica, Georgia, that he was grateful that Mrs. Ellis had sent his wife a carpet, but that since she had bought one last summer, she did not need it.¹ Pringle, whose business imports included most of the dry goods and textiles usually expected in the colony, apparently did not consider carpets a salable item. Letters which document eight years of Pringle's trading do not mention any. In his own household he considered one carpet quite enough, although he did also have a floorcloth. Carpets for use on the floor were late-comers in western interiors, and Pringle's own carpet inventory, though sparse, may well have put him in the forefront of fashion at the time.

When the importation of oriental carpets to the West, and particularly to the continent, first began they were treated as a combination of extraordinary art object and unique possession. They were enormously expensive. Sixty carpets acquired by Cardinal Wolsey in England in the sixteenth century were valued at six hundred ducats. Ecclesiastical institutions and individuals and members of royal households were virtually their only customers, and it was only gradually that the ownership of carpets filtered down to the nobility, wealthy land-owners, and merchants. Fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth century paintings attest to this, and to the fact that they were rarely put on the floor. They were mainly hung as tapestries, or placed on tables, chests or cupboards. Even in the eighteenth century, the change from table to floor came slowly, and not

universally. In England this shift in use is considered to have occurred around 1725. In a portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bull, by Arthur Davis, a carpet is placed under the couple in the middle of the floor (Fig. 1). There is an element of surprise in its presence. "Look what we've got," the rest of the room seems to say.

Along with the late acceptance of floor carpets as a fashion, there was an architectural influence which should be considered. Ceilings seem to have been far more favored areas for flights of decorative fancy than floors, as were fireplace surrounds, doorways, windows, and walls. Perhaps this was because floors are flat, and only so much flat decoration seemed appropriate. Also, the floor was common; people walked on it. How much nicer to draw the eye to details of sculptured moldings or plaster, or to astound the viewer with oil paintings hung high where they would elevate the spirit.

European and English decorating customs quickly found their way across the Atlantic to the newly founded American colonies. The first colonists for South Carolina arrived in 1670 under a proprietary charter issued in 1663. One of the most immediate problems for the settlement was finding an economic base for survival. Something had to be produced there that could be traded to England. The answer came in the form of deerskins, provided through the Indian trade. Later, in the 1690's, the cultivation of rice was tried, and proved successful. Fortunes began to be made on these commodities, and also on the African slave trade that became an essential part of the rice economy. The proprietary government proved unsatisfactory, and in 1719 was superseded; South Carolina became a royal colony.² Planters continued to reap the benefits of large land holdings, and merchants, at first seeing the opportunity in Charleston from a purely business angle, began to settle permanently, or their sons did. Charleston was the largest eighteenth century port south of Philadelphia and fed a growing area of settlements both up and down the coast and inland. More immigrants were attracted from across the Atlantic, joining the existing nucleus of earlier families with origins in the Bahamas and England, New England, France, and Switzerland. Not always immediately compatible in religion or politics, the newcomers nevertheless gradually were assimilated into society. And if members of the artisan class so aspired, they could reap the rewards for hard work and industry by buying land, and

marrying into families already higher on the social scale. A favorite phrase used to describe personal acquisitions from overseas was "in the newest taste." The only difference between some object fashionable in both England and South Carolina was often just the weeks it took to cross the Atlantic.

Carpet use in South Carolina can be roughly divided into three periods. Starting in the late 1730's, there was a period of individual choice and single purchases, when a carpet was chosen as a fashionable curiosity. The next period, from approximately 1750 to 1780, covers the gradual increase in the carpets making up merchants' consignments. They were overwhelmingly outnumbered by other textiles, but they did occasionally occur. During this same period, particularly in the 1750's and 1760's, carpets for tables were still fashionable, and increasingly were called "table carpets," as though it was necessary to differentiate from "floor carpets." By this time, floor carpets were called "carpets." Changes in the British textile industry and technical improvements in the machinery of spinning and weaving were observed and absorbed on both sides of the Atlantic, and influenced carpet weaving. An important invention in England during the 1750's was hand-knotted seamless carpets, inspired by the admiration for Turkey carpets. A certain amount of influence was also provided by the Savonnerie manufactory in France. An item fit to be reported in an American newspaper, and a reflection of this interest, turned up in the *Virginia Gazette* in 1767:

From Edinburgh. A fine carpet . . . ordered to be manufactured in Pittenweem in Fifeshire, for her Royal Highness, the princess Dowager of Wales . . . is now finished. It is esteemed by the best judges to rival, if not excel the manufactures of even Turkey and Persia. The figures finely fancied, the colours exquisite . . . It is about 25 feet long, by 17 in breadth. The carpet, we are told, is valued at three hundred pounds sterling . . .³

What made more impact on American shores was the increasing manufacture of narrow-width carpets, which had to be seamed to make them room size. Some were pileless, of double-weave; other, piled, were called Brussels and Wiltons, according to whether they had a looped pile or a cut pile like velvet. Floorcloths, made of painted canvas, were another important import. The seamed carpets in England called for the

help of upholsterers, so that they could be professionally installed. A good idea of this kind of work can be gathered from the accounts of William Linnell and Thomas Chippendale, both fashionable cabinetmakers who undertook upholstery. Under their direction carpets were laid in any shape or size of room, changed to suit a different room, taken up for storage or cleaning or when the house was shut for the season, mended, fitted with protective baize or serge covers, and provided with special rollers for their transport or storage. Chippendale's accounts mentioned repairing a "large carpet pole"⁴ and providing three carpet brooms.⁵ Linnell's accounts included tacking down a Turkey carpet,⁶ and cutting out several table carpets.⁷ These accounts are from the 1750-90 period. During the 1750's and 60's, Charleston upholsterers did not mention the installation of carpets, although they were enthusiastic installers of wall-paper.

Beginning from about 1782, upholsterers in Charleston did begin to declare their willingness and ability to suit customers with the latest carpet fashions. This meant importing them, and also attending to "the executive part of the business," as R. Alken called it in an advertisement of 16 February 1785.⁸ Carpeting could be installed wall to wall or in the center of a room, leaving a border of floor. Installation meant first putting down the border, being careful to mitre the corners, and allowing for any protuberances in a room, such as the fireplace or base moldings. The field pattern had to be most carefully matched and tacked with sealing thread. Then it was taken out and firmly sewed up. To make the carpet stay flat, it was stretched with a tool called a "strainer," which was a toothed wooden affair. It was usually tacked around the edges when installed. Carpets for stairs were advertised later, intended for use with brass rods, and continued mention was made of bedside carpets. Hearthrugs seem to have been the most popular of the smaller carpets. Specific kinds of carpeting were mentioned with increasing frequency, such as McDowell and Black's ad of a hundred bales of "fresh imported woollens," including "an extensive assortment of carpets and hearth rugs, viz. 4-4 Kidderminster carpeting and carpets/4-4 Venetian carpeting/5-8½ ditto for stairs/Brussels fancy and Common rugs. . . ."⁹

Kidderminster, which was in Worcestershire, was an old textile center; the earliest reference to carpet weaving there



Figure 2. 18th century carpet manufacturing centers in Great Britain and ports (bold face) used as outlets to South Carolina.

occurred in the seventeenth century. The manufacture of double-weave carpets was introduced there around 1735. The first English Brussels carpets were woven in Wilton, Wiltshire, but Kidderminster took these up in 1749. Wilton carpets were probably developed around this time too, and because this happened at Wilton, were named for this town. The Brussels weave is supposed to have been copied by English producers from Flanders, hence its name.¹⁰ Both Brussels and Wiltons were woven much the same way, on draw looms. To form the pile, a separate element was introduced, in the form of wires running in the direction of the wefts, with extra warps run over these wires. When the wires were withdrawn, little loops resulted above the main weave, and formed the pile. Cutting the loops was done by adding a sharp knife to the end of the wires, so that they cut the loops when they were withdrawn. This was somewhat the same technique as that used in weaving velvets. Colors were generally limited to five, but could be cleverly manipulated and planned to form circular patterns as well as geometric ones. The width was at first based on the Flemish ell, or twenty-seven inches.

Double-weave carpets were woven at the same time at Kidderminster, and although by 1838, seven-eighths of the city's 2020 looms were producing Brussels, the name had stuck to the double-weaves. Scotland grew to be an important area for double-weaves, and the carpets produced there were soon termed "Scotch carpets." By 1774, Kilmarnock in Ayrshire was the best-known center.¹¹ They may have been a bit flatter than the English examples, and they were a Scottish ell wide, or thirty-seven inches. It is difficult to decide which were actual Scottish products, and which were not. A Charleston ship arriving from Leith, which is near Edinburgh, could be assumed to be carrying goods from its Scottish suppliers.¹² A ship from London might have carried a mixed cargo. Double weaves, of whatever name, were produced on one loom, which wove two cloths simultaneously back to back, the threads interlacing at planned intervals so that the back and front were firmly joined. The colors could be arranged so that the carpets were reversible. A three-ply weave was eventually invented at Kilmarnock in 1824, and a year later the Jacquard loom was applied to these weaves at Kidderminster (Fig. 2).

Thomas Sheraton, in his 1803 *Cabinet Dictionary*, rated carpets for his readers:

The Persian and Turkey carpets are the most esteemed. The Parisian carpets are a tolerable imitation of these. But besides the Persian, Turkey and Parisian carpets, there are the following sorts, which have their names from the places where they are manufactured, as Brussels carpet, the metropolis of the dukedom of Brabant Kidderminster—a town in Worcestershire Wilton—a town in Wiltshire Axbridge—in Somersetshire Venetian carpet, generally striped. And Scots carpet, which is one of the most inferior kind.¹³

He described the best as having suitable narrow-width borders, and stair carpets as being “half a yard, half ell, and three-quarters wide.”¹⁴ By Axbridge, he must have meant Axminster, which was in Devonshire, and not Somersetshire. Axminster was the home of Thomas Whitty, who in the 1750’s was part of the development of English hand-knotted seamless carpets. He began his experiments by examining a Turkish carpet, and managed to try a small square on his horizontal broadloom, though making the carpet seamless eluded him. On a trip to London, he heard of a carpet being hand-knotted at Fulham, under the direction of a Frenchman named Parisot. Whitty managed to visit this factory, and by his observations there, solved the rest of his problems. Now he knew he should string his warp on a vertical loom, and that by setting the side poles at a desired distance from each other, he could have almost any width of fabric he wanted. The pattern was formed by rows of knots, hand tied one by one around two warps at a time, followed by two shoots of ordinary weft. Under this system, there was no limit to the colors that could be used. The ends of the knots came to the front, were cut, and formed the pile. For weavers, Whitty employed his own children; his first carpet was much admired, and visitors came to watch its progress. His son and grandson succeeded him in the business.¹⁵

Another English weaver of hand-knotted carpets was Thomas Moore, of Moorfields. The Fulham factory, run by Parisot, only lasted from 1751 to 1756, and when Parisot moved to Exeter, Moore took on two of his best workmen. Parisot’s Exeter carpets were distinguished by the signature “Exon,” woven into the border. Moore competed for the premium offered in 1756 by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of

Arts and Manufactures, and won it jointly with Thomas Whitty. Both Moore and Whitty were kept busy by commissions for some of the great houses of England. Robert Adam, the architect, had Moorfields carpets woven to correspond with the ceiling patterns in some of his rooms, such as one surviving at Saltram House, Devonshire. A Thomas Moore carpet was owned by William Bingham in Philadelphia in the 1790's.¹⁶ It was "Axminster," however, that became the term associated with a certain quality of carpet, just as "Turkey" and "Persian" denoted other qualities in this era. Moore's trade card in the 1790's advertised "Axminster, Turkey and Persian carpets" coming from his looms. Another proof of such generalization of terms occurs in Moore's will, where he left his nephew "my large Persia loom and utensils."¹⁷ When the terms "Turkey" and "Persia" were associated with Wilton and Brussels carpets, the reference was to design rather than quality.

Carpets with the pattern produced by the weave were not the only floor coverings used in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Floorcloths with the pattern applied to the surface by means of paint were popular. Widths of canvas or sailcloth were seamed and pumiced smooth, and then sized to receive paint. Several coats of paint were applied in succession, and allowed to dry in between. Then the design was painted, or, at a later date, printed with wooden blocks. There was no limit to possible designs, and marble floors were copied, as were flowered carpet patterns and many geometric designs.¹⁸ Professionally finished, they were durable and flexible, and could be easily swept and washed. When the paint wore off, it could be restored. It did not take much imagination for local painters such as those in Charleston to realize that they could import the canvas and do the painting themselves, although floorcloths were first imported or bought in England.

Henry Laurens, while in England in 1748, was commissioned to find some floorcloths for Benjamin Smith. He reported in a letter that he had "... chose out two floorcloths & the scrubbers you mention which I hope will please. You did not mention any size for the former so I was at a loss but in case they should not suit your rooms I apprehend you may always dispose of them to advantage."¹⁹

London painted floorcloths were advertised in Charleston in 1736, 1740, 1749, 1750, and 1752, but local competition was growing. In 1770, among household expenses in his account

Sundries Dr To Cash		£ 424 5.7	
20. House Expenses	paid William Pickens for Oil Cloths	£ 12.12.4	
	paid for Oil Cloths in full to Mr. Walford of North Carolina	£ 25.8.6	
	paid for a new quantity of Oil Cloths	£ 12.12.4	
	paid for Oil Cloths in full for a new quantity of Oil Cloths	£ 150.0.0	
	paid for Oil Cloths in full for a new quantity of Oil Cloths	£ 16.10.0	
	paid for Oil Cloths in full for a new quantity of Oil Cloths	£ 87.14.11	
	paid for Oil Cloths in full for a new quantity of Oil Cloths	£ 24.0.0	
	paid for Oil Cloths in full for a new quantity of Oil Cloths	£ 16.3.6	
		<u>372.10.3</u>	
41. Stock	paid for Oil Cloths in full for a new quantity of Oil Cloths	£ 11.6.4	
38. Plantation	paid for Oil Cloths in full for a new quantity of Oil Cloths	£ 50.0.0	

Figure 3. A floorcloth entry in the account book of Charleston cabinetmaker Thomas Elfe, 1770. Louis Schwartz photograph.

book, Thomas Elfe, a well-known cabinetmaker in Charleston, paid the painter Joseph Badger £24.0.0 for painting a floorcloth²⁰ (Fig. 3). Charleston floorcloths were known in North Carolina: "Painted floorcloths are manufactured at Charleston by Mr. Walford, equal in quality, if not superior, to those hitherto imported, being of a lighter quality, and less liable to crack."²¹ And early nineteenth century residents of Charleston who needed such an item could go to John Diamond, who had

. . . resumed the business of Oil Cloth Painting and Printing . . . He prepares several kinds of Oil Cloths, plain, and printed with neat figures, viz. Floor, Passage, and Stair Cloths; Chair carpets, Table and Celerette Covers, plain, or with borders . . . Awnings for boats, varnished linen . . . oil cloths for covering the bodies of riding carriages, in a better manner than has yet appeared in Charleston, on linen, silk or homespun.²²

Waterproofing various fabrics was an art often associated with painting floorcloths.

The importation of floor coverings remained steady in Charleston, and there seemed to be custom for both "home" products, English products, and also Philadelphia and perhaps Baltimore weaves. Competing with London was the English city of Bristol, particularly the firm of John Hare & Co. A factory weaving strong cloth seven yards wide in Philadelphia was reported in the *Charleston Courier* in 1807: "The object of this factory is that of making the Patent Floor Cloths or Summer Carpets, similar to those of Hare's patent heretofore always imported, for the perfection of which it is best that there should be no seam."²³ A very different report of this English company

was published in the *Democratic Clarion and Tennessee Gazette* in Nashville, 8 June 1810:

Andrew Pearse, a very industrious man who works at Mssrs. Hare and Son's floor cloth manufactory, Bristol, was married January 20, 1801, to Hannah Taylor, by whom he had fourteen children in little more than six years, with a speedy prospect of further increase to the family. The children consist of 3 boys, born Oct. 1, 1801; two boys, Oct. 2, 1802; one boy and one girl, July 16, 1803; two boys, May 13, 1804; one boy and a girl, Feb. 14, 1805; one boy and a girl, Jan. 15, 1806; one boy, Nov. 14, 1807.²⁴

If they all became apprentices to the trade, the industry must have taken a quick leap forward.

A Philadelphia notice came to Charleston from Mr. Macauley, thanking the inhabitants for their orders, and assuring them that their cloths would be sent down with the next packet.²⁵ Macauley's Patent Floor Cloths listed prices for 1819:

a Floor cloth with 2 colors	\$1.50 pr. sq. yd.
do. do. 3 do.	1.75 do.
do. do. 4 do.	2.00 do.
do. do. 5 or more	2.25 do.

Twenty-five cents per yard for Borders.²⁶

In Lexington, Kentucky, Levett & Smith were promoting their Oil Floor Cloth Factory from 1810. They promised they would sell their carpets below Philadelphia prices, and their patterns would be equal if not better, since they had brought a set of wooden printing blocks from that place.²⁷ They had their own paint mill which permitted them to grind hundred-pound lots of paint.²⁸ Old worsted and baize carpets could also be brought to them to be sized and painted, if they were smoothly darned and in reasonable condition.²⁹ The firm placed emphasis on the fact that floor cloths were

. . . much in use in the Northern, Eastern and Southern states, where they are highly approved of for rooms, entries, carriages, &c. They are cool in summer and most useful in winter, because they can be cleaned in long spells of rainy weather by washing them as you would the floor, whereas woollen carpets must remain wet & dirty

during the bad weather—which not only damages the carpet, but is very injurious to the health of the family . . .³⁰

Moreau de Saint Méry, a French traveler to American shores in the 1790's, commented on the use of carpets here, and how they were kept down during the summer except in Charleston "where they are unrolled only during the winter, and after noon, and kept rolled the rest of the time."³¹ This is the only reference found so far on a possible difference in carpet use due to the climate in South Carolina. In the nineteenth century seasonal carpet changes were made in many places as a routine necessary to good housekeeping, and straw matting was one type of summer carpeting used.

References to straw mats or matting in advertisements began by 1803 with the mention of "a Lisbon floor matt" in the *Charleston Courier* for 30 April 1803. The *Courier* later advertised other similar products:

India Floor Mats, Plain and Coloured, to fit any room; ditto table matts, sets very superior in neatness and durability. Alicant mats for Phizzes (Piazzas), Entries and Church Pews. Worth the Attention of families. (*Charleston Courier*, 28 May 1806)

Will be sold at the Vendue Store, Blair & Napier . . . 150 Summer Floor Matts, of various sizes and colours. (*Charleston Courier*, 14 March, 1810)

And from two Virginia newspapers came similar notices:

On hand at the auction store . . . Holland rush carpets (justly celebrated for their durability) of different breadths and qualities. (*Alexandria Herald*, 19 June, 1818)

6 Bundles India floor mats, just received at low prices. This is a useful and cheap article, well deserving public attention. (*Petersburg Republican*, 5 May 1820)

In Baltimore, the *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser* for 20 June 1808, noted the arrival of "the Schooner *Grand Sachem* Captain Holmes, from New York," with "100 packages Straw carpeting for passage and parlour floors; a variety of figures and colours, for sale by Cornthwait & Yarnall." Other students of American floor coverings have examined this subject, notably

Helene von Rosenstiehl in her book *American Rugs and Carpets*. From such sources we find that George Washington bought straw carpeting for Mt. Vernon, and that Thomas Jefferson rejected it when choosing something to lay under his dining-room table. Israel Acrelius, Royal Representative to the Swedish Congregation on the Delaware River in the 1750's, found straw carpeting there but felt that it quickly filled with fly spots and vermin and became dirty from the kitchen smoke.³² Although this type of carpeting was probably sold in the eighteenth century, the extent of its use cannot be documented. Perhaps the use of straw matting represented a resurgence of fashion at the end of the century, corresponding somewhat to the use of caning in chairs, which had been popular in the seventeenth century and also enjoyed a revival at this time. A stimulus in America was provided by the post-Revolutionary China trade which imported mats from the Far East along with other goods.

In South Carolina, straw mats might have been manufactured much closer to home. There is no record of their being part of the Indian trade, but the weaving of baskets and mats was a normal Indian skill. William Bartram, a naturalist, traveled through North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and east and west Florida in 1773. In two instances when he was entertained in an Indian village, he saw a native use of mats. On one of these occasions, as he recorded in his journal, he was invited into

a grand airy pavillion . . . It was four-square; a range of pillars or posts on each side supporting a canopy composed of Palmetto leaves woven or thatched together, which shade a level platform in the centre . . . covered with carpets or mats, curiously woven of split canes dyed of various colours. Here being seated or reclining ourselves, after smoaking tobacco, baskets of the choicest fruits were brought an set before us . . .³³

Mats also could be woven easily at home, and that there were appropriate materials at hand is proved by numerous entries in South Carolina inventories for "straw-bottom chairs," "bass-bottom chairs," "palmetto-bottom chairs," "flag-bottom chairs," both "wicker" and "cane baskets," and the like. Instances of grass hammocks are also found, and when Dr. Alexander Garden of Charleston decided to send some gifts of a scientific nature to John Ellis, a Fellow of the Royal Society in

London, he included a silk grass hammock as "at least a curiosity, and a proof to your infidels what America can produce."³⁴

It is important to realize that the word "matt" by itself in an inventory or ad, does not necessarily mean a straw mat. There were other mats, of wool or worsted weave that were used to protect wooden furniture when it was being moved. Woolen mats were occasionally used on floors and tables. The difference between mats and other protective covers such as baizes and druggets was that mats were probably heavier. They were cut, shaped and bound around the edges. Baize recently has been defined very thoroughly by Colonial Williamsburg during its refurbishing of the Governor's Palace. Reproduction baize made for that project shows a green woolen or worsted fabric of a slightly loose weave, somewhat frizzed on the surface.³⁵ Druggets are harder to identify. Their manufacture began in France under the name "droguet," either of wool or a wool and silk mixture, and when the weaving of druggets was brought to Ireland in the 18th Century, the fabric was either worsted and wool, wool and silk, or wool and linen. Very fine druggets were being sold at Mr. Wragg's Charleston wharf in 1741 at 8s. and 4d. a yard³⁶ and a remnant of French drugget was inventoried among Thomas Jeny's belongings in 1747.³⁷

List carpeting was occasionally mentioned in the Low Country, and was made on a loom in narrow widths, with a yarn warp, the wefts made from strips of cloth. The strips might have been cut from leftover carpets or some other strong fabrics. List carpets were considered utilitarian, and could be easily washed. The pattern was usually stripes provided by the colored weft strips, which if bleached and dyed, could be arranged to match up across seams. If left as they were, the wefts created a haphazard effect, probably accounting for the nineteenth century term "hit or miss carpet."³⁸

Although this study does not seek to be a quantitative analysis, it is obvious that Turkish carpets, if newspaper advertisement and inventories are any indication, lagged far behind the other imports. In eleven hundred inventories read for the period 1739 to 1783, at the time when Turkey carpets should have been the height of fashion, only six of the sixty-nine carpets listed were "Turkey." The earliest group of inventories, covering the period 1738-1743, did not mention floor carpets of any kind, only table carpets. Of course, information gathered from inventories must be qualified. The items there often repre-

sent old purchases of earlier fashion, or inherited items, and there is no way to ascertain how they were acquired. Inventories are useful, however, for their documentation of what was in use at a certain date. Charleston County inventories represented individuals living far from Charleston, since there was but one county court for the entire colony until after the Revolution. Though it would be helpful to know the exact residence and economic status of each of the deceased, for this kind of survey enough general data can be gathered to understand the entries for carpets. Richard Wright's inventory, for instance, was recorded in 1747. It was taken room by room at his "Wapoo" plantation, where he died, and there is a briefer list for his Charleston house. The inventory total is missing, and many items are blurred. The first room mentioned is the "Hall," which contained two Turkey carpets. Other items in the hall included a list of silver plate, a couch and two elbow chairs, six leather bottom chairs, a map of North Carolina and two prints, a sword, a French horn, and a fireback. In the "Room next to the hall" there was a bedstead and bed furniture, 6 chairs with leather bottoms, one easy chair, one mahogany close stool and pan, eleven "Don Quixotes" in glass, and nineteen other pictures, fireplace accessories, a looking glass, and jewelry. The house contained a back chamber, a little room or closet under the stairs, three chambers and an entry upstairs. Listed in the inventory of Wright's Charleston house was one floor cloth.³⁹ A description of the plantation and house was published several years after Wright's death, when it was being sold at auction:

There is on said plantation a very large brick house, two brick out houses, a good oven, two sets of large white oak indigo vats, a lime vat, a large pump (all set up in May last), two sets of brick vats, a great many orange bearing trees, a fine reserve of water sufficient to work a great variety of vats, several pleasant walks and a variety of exceeding fine oaks. The plantation is delightfully situated; from the house you may see Charles Town, Sullivant's Island, and up the Ashley River; it is but 4 miles from town, and is quite convenient to market.⁴⁰

The other oriental carpets found belonged to Benjamin Smith (inventory of 1770); John McKenzie (1771), his carpet valued at £40, and Mrs. Mary Bull whose 1772 inventory listed her carpet at £20.⁴¹ John Izard and Peter Manigault also owned



Figure 4. Benjamin Smith by John Wollaston, oil on canvas, 29¼ x 24¾. The Carolina Art Association, Gibbes Art Gallery.

such carpets. At Benjamin Smith's death, he was described as "a gentleman possessed of every amiable qualification necessary to endear and sweeten life. Blessed with an excellent disposition, he added to his own, by imparting happiness to others. And having acquired a very extensive fortune in trade, he made it greatly subservient to relieve the poor and succour the distressed"⁴² (Fig. 4). He left several large donations to charitable organizations; his wife was given her choice of his household furniture. There were no floor cloths in Smith's inventory, despite the fact that Henry Laurens had sent him some on one occasion. Perhaps they had been sold, or had worn out.⁴³

John McKenzie owned a Wilton carpet worth £80, a Turkey carpet listed at £40, a small Wilton at £25, and a Scotch carpet worth £6. He also owned such extravagant items as a harpsichord valued at £350, a marble slab and frame, £30; and green ivory-handled knives and forks valued at £12.⁴⁴ McKenzie was a member of the Parish of St. James, Goose Creek. He was very active politically, and during the Townshend Act controversy of 1769, he sided with the non-importation faction.⁴⁵ When he died, it was noted that he was "a gentleman well acquainted with his letters, strictly just in all his dealings, warm in his friendships, steady in his principle, and happy in an amiable consort and a numerous acquaintance."⁴⁶ He left his library of seven hundred books to the Charleston Library Society.⁴⁷

The Bull family of South Carolina was a large and politically prominent family which had settled in the colony early. Mrs. Mary Bull was the wife of John Bull, the youngest son of Stephen Bull, a Justice of the Peace. She was born at Ashley Hall, and died at "Coosaw" plantation, or Bull's island, in Prince William Parish.⁴⁸ She had two carpets each worth more than her £20. Turkey carpet, and perhaps she was proudest of all of her matching set of India chintz bedcurtains, window curtains and chair covers, worth £400.⁴⁹

John Izard's interest in carpets was first recorded when he paid £120 for a "floor carpet" at the sale of Lionel Chambers' estate in 1777.⁵⁰ Izard was described as the "head of the St. George's branch of the family and possessed of a very large estate."⁵¹ His inventory was taken in 1781, and plantations mentioned there were "Ponpon," "Old Combahee," "Newfield," "Peach Tree Hill," "Hobanna," and "Cedar Grove." Among all these plantations there were only several bedside carpets, a large Wilton carpet and a small hearth rug, and his "large Turkey carpet" was lumped in a list with "an old screen, 2 fire grates compleat with hearth fender £40 (sterling)."⁵²

A possible generalization of the use of floor coverings may be drawn through the realization that many plantations were only furnished in a utilitarian way, and it was often one favorite one, or a town house, that was chosen to be elegant and complete. Slaves were generally the most expensive of all possessions, and valuable livestock came next. Some individuals, such as James Parson, an Irish-born merchant who had risen to become a barrister-at-law and the Vice-President of the State in 1778,⁵³ did have outstandingly expensive carpets. His inventory

listed values in pounds sterling: "a large carpet and 2 foot cleaners £300 / 2 carpets £130 / a carpet and table cover £25 / a large carpet £700."⁵⁴ These particularly high values suggest that he ordered hand-knotted English carpets, though by and large household effects were not the possessions which opened purse strings the widest.



Figure 5. "Steepbrook," Peter Manigault's country house at Goose Creek. The watercolor view was painted by Jacques Burkhardt for Manigault's son, Gabriel. MESDA accession 992.

The Manigault family is represented by a house still standing in Charleston, originally owned by Joseph Manigault. It is also represented by a small watercolor of a plantation house at Goose Creek, "Steepbrook," painted for Gabriel Manigault about 1803 by J. Burckhart (Fig. 5) in the MESDA collection. Peter Manigault, Gabriel's father, built "Steepbrook," which he owned from 1757 until his death in 1773.⁵⁵ Peter Manigault was a lawyer by training, but gave most of his time to the management of his own plantation affairs, as well as those of others, and collected debts for several London merchants who had accounts in South Carolina.⁵⁶ "Steepbrook," built as a country retreat, had a Scotch carpet. Peter finished a fine house for himself in Charleston in 1771, and wrote to Benjamin Stead, one of his correspondents, to send him the furnishings detailed in an enclosed list. He suggested to Stead that if he thought this list extravagant, he should see what was in the houses of Miles Brewton and Laughton Smith, both of whom had spent twice as

much.⁵⁷ It might have been at this time that the India carpet listed in his inventory was bought. At £70, this was his most expensive carpet, the others being a painted floorcloth, £25, a large Scotch carpet, £20, 2 smaller Scotch carpets, 3 narrow carpets to go around a bed, and a small painted floor cloth valued at £5, and 3 list carpets.⁵⁸

In spite of the small number of Oriental carpets apparently in use in South Carolina, it was agreed that these were the finest. One of South Carolina's most successful merchants, Henry Laurens, was well known politically as a member of the South Carolina delegation to the Continental Congress; he was president of that body in 1777 and 1778. During this term, the French Alliance was signed, and the Articles of Confederation were approved by Congress.⁵⁹ When John Singleton Copley painted his portrait in London in 1782, those two documents were included as prominent displays on a table covered by a deep pile oriental-design carpet. Artistically portrayed so that it is impossible to guess its provenance from the design, the carpet nevertheless symbolizes the fact that Laurens appreciated the best (Fig. 6).

After the American Revolution, and especially after the turn of the century, America attempted to increase trade with other European countries, although it never ceased to obtain the most-needed goods from England. Though this would be the time to expect an importation of French carpets, an examination of ship cargoes out of Bordeaux and Marseilles for 1806 yields instead such articles as French silks and silk stockings, gloves, Morocco slippers, wines, cosmetics, Paris mustard, writing paper, salad oil and almonds. One entry for a Gobelins tapestry is close to the topic, but not close enough.⁶⁰ One might hope to find mention of "carpets from the famous manufactory at Aubusson" or even simply "French carpets." New York did see the arrival of French carpets in 1816, an advertisement noting that

A few specimens from the celebrated manufactory of Thoulouse, may be seen at the stores of Mr. Boisregard; which for firmness of fabrick and beauty of coloring, exceed anything of the kind ever offered for sale in this country. A surface 30 feet square, without a seam, having the appearance of the finest velvet, strewed with flowers, fruit and figures, is an object well worth the inspection of the curious.⁶¹



Figure 6. Mezzotint by Valentine Green of the portrait of Henry Laurens by John Singleton Copley, London, 1782, 22¾ x 16. The Carolina Art Association, Gibbes Art Gallery.

A query to Madeleine Jarry, the author of two books on Savonnerie and Aubusson carpets, revealed that no information is known to exist of a carpet manufactory at Toulouse.⁶²

Another expected development after the American Revolution was the manufacture of more domestic goods, which the press in this country avidly supported. The newspapers published diatribes on the need to keep imported ware out of the

White House furnishings, and they further commented on fashion being paraded in this country as the result of aping foreigners. The patriotic, moral and economic benefits of encouraging our own industries were extolled in print with great vigor. In 1801 there were nine Brussels carpets, five common carpets, unused pieces of other carpeting, and a rolled-up floor cloth in the White House.⁶³ In the 1790's, a manufactory for hand-knotted carpets was started by Peter Sprague in Philadelphia and was quite successful, but there was no strong development to compete with the Brussels and Wilton imports. In general, there was no significant American contribution to carpet weaving until 1839, when Erastus Bigelow patented a steam-powered loom for the manufacture of double-weave carpets and thereby set off a chain of manufacturing developments. Otherwise, the only other competition for imports came from itinerant weavers who took their drawlooms to outlying districts and advertised for yarn and customers. Current research at MESDA is yielding information about South Carolina weavers, but evidence for the types of work these artisans were doing is sparse. Some of the earliest weavers were French Huguenots, many of whom settled in Craven District. Perhaps some of these offered work similar to that of John Bantz of Maryland, who in 1805 wove "Dyaper coverlets, carpits, both single and double,"⁶⁴ or Adam Maguire in Tennessee, who with his partner Alexander Craig, arrived in the Nashville area in the same year "To carry on the Dyeing and Weaving business in all their various branches: to wit—carpets, double coverlids, diaper, muslinets, dimities, jeans, summer counterpanes . . ."⁶⁵ An itinerant weaver may have been the source of "a large Kentucky Scotch carpet," included in the auction of artist George Beck's effects in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1812.⁶⁶ The encouragement given to American weavers is underlined by such events as the premiums proposed in 1819 by the Agricultural Society of North Carolina for nine local manufactures, including one for "the best piece of 30 yards of Woollen carpeting, to resemble Scotch carpeting."⁶⁷

Many isolated instances of carpet work have probably gone unrecorded. Correspondence survives, however, which included three letters describing an unusually appealing personal project. The letters were exchanged between Margaret Izard Manigault of Charleston and her friend Gabrielle Josephine Dupont, who at the time was in New York. "It is all the ton," wrote Margaret

in February, 1800, "To work very handsome borders for carpets, & to make the center of green cloth."⁶⁸ In August she wrote again, this time quite excited, that she had . . . "just received a shipment from England . . . dimity, percale, cotton batiste . . . and linens. And above all a carpet—but what a carpet. The background is handsome green material. And the border is tapestry, and it is I who will undertake that bit of handwork. The border is half a yard wide, and superb. Will you help me this winter?"⁶⁹ Both women were skilled needlewomen, and had often embellished details of their wardrobes with panels of their own silk embroidery; this work was probably to be done in crewels. Josephine replied in November that "The tapes seem to be a sizeable undertaking, but worthy of your courage. I envision it must be very pretty. If you find a way to send me a band of it, I will contribute with all my heart to the success of the enterprise."⁷⁰

It may seem from the evidence presented here that floor coverings saw almost universal use by 1820. This was far from the case. It took later industrial development of a much expanded sort to accomplish that and the discussion of such technological achievements is beyond the scope of this research. Western carpets woven before 1820 were of high quality and excellent design, but not cheap. Even the so-called cheaper varieties were a large investment for a household, especially in terms of yardage. They wore out if not properly cared for, and there were many problems associated with keeping them clean. The sandy soil of South Carolina left its mark on house interiors; even the paved sidewalks introduced to Charleston in 1764⁷¹ were not always kept clear. Women there often wore pattens, or clogs, when walking abroad. Fashionable indoor shoes were soft, and after 1800 were made without heels, but it was still difficult to protect carpets from abrasions. Though still in its infancy, however, the fashion for floor coverings had come to stay. Carpets enhanced other household objects, and completed, as it were, the fourth side of the boxlike space that comprised a room.

Mrs. Michie is a member of the MESDA interpretive staff.

FOOTNOTES

1. Walter P. Edgar, *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), Vol. 1, p. 158.
2. M. Eugene Sirmans, *Colonial South Carolina, A Political History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), pp. 4-117.
3. *Virginia Gazette*, June, 1767.
4. Christopher Gilbert, *The Life and Times of Thomas Chippendale* (N.Y.: MacMillan Co., 1978), p. 187.
5. *Ibid*, p. 230.
6. Helena Hayward and Pat Kirkham, *William and John Linnell* (N.Y.: Rizzoli International Publishers Ltd., 1980), Appendix II, p. 152.
7. *Ibid*, p. 144.
8. *South Carolina Gazette and Public Advertiser*, 16 Feb. 1785.
9. *Charleston Courier*, 2 Oct. 1820.
10. C.E.C. Tattersall and S. Reed, *A History of British Carpets* (Leigh-on-Sea, England: F. Lewis Publishers, Ltd., Rev. ed. 1966), p. 75.
11. Margaret Swain, "A Note on Scotch Carpets," *Furniture History* (Leeds, England: The Furniture History Society, 1978), Vol. XIV, pp. 61-62.
12. *South Carolina Gazette*, 26 Nov. 1753.
13. Venetian carpeting is usually described as "warp-striped," but an ad in the *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Advertiser*, 18 September 1805, mentioned "rich striped, clouded and fancy Venetian carpeting." It was flat weave seamed fabric, increasingly popular in the 19th century.
14. Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Dictionary* (N.Y.: Prager, 1970 ed., facsimile of 1805 edition), Vol. 1, p. 132.
15. Bertram Jacobs, *Axminster Carpets, 1755-1957* (Leigh-on-Sea, England: F. Lewis Publishers, Ltd., 1970), pp. 21-24.
16. Mildred B. Lanier, *English and Oriental Carpets at Colonial Williamsburg* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1975), p. 25.
17. Wendy Hefford, "Thomas Moore of Moorfields," *The Burlington Magazine* (London: The Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd., Dec. 1977), Vol. CXLX, pp. 840-848.
18. James Ayres, *The Shell Book of the Home in Britain* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), p. 121.
19. Philip M. Hamer, *The Papers of Henry Laurens* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press), Vol. 1, p. 193.
20. "The Thomas Elfe Account Book," *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, (hereinafter cited as SCHGM), Vol. 35, p. 154.
21. *The Raleigh Register*, 22 June 1809.
22. *The Times*, Charleston, South Carolina, 1 Aug. 1812.
23. *Charleston Courier*, 3 Sept. 1807.
24. *The Democratic Clarion and Tennessee Gazette*, Nashville, 8 June 1810.
25. *Charleston Courier*, 30 March 1811.
26. *Raleigh Register*, 23 July 1819.

27. *Kentucky Gazette*, 11 Dec. 1810.
28. *Kentucky Gazette*, 17 July 1810.
29. *Charleston Courier*, 3 Sept. 1807. This was a suggestion of Macauley's in Philadelphia as well.
30. *Kentucky Gazette*, 28 May 1810.
31. Rodris Roth, *Floor Coverings in 18th Century America* (Washington, D.C.: The Smithsonian, 1967), p. 29.
32. Helene von Rosenstiehl, *American Rugs and Carpets* (N.Y.: Wm. Morrow & Co., 1978), p. 19.
33. William Bartram, *Travels* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1980, facsimile of 1792 edition), p. 302.
34. Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy Smith Berkeley, *Dr. Alexander Garden of Charles Town* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 177.
35. Information on the appearance of baize gathered at a workshop given by Linda Baumgarten, 1982 Williamsburg Antiques Forum.
36. *South Carolina Gazette*, 28 May 1741.
37. Charleston County *Inventories*, 1746-1748.
38. For a discussion of rag carpets see Nina Fletcher Little, *Floor Coverings in New England Before 1850*. (Sturbridge: Old Sturbridge Village, 1967), pp. 26-30.
39. Charleston County *Inventories*, 1746-1748.
40. *SCHGM*, Vol. 20, p. 77.
41. Pounds, unless otherwise noted, are given in South Carolina currency, which was generally 7 to 1 to Sterling.
42. *SCHGM*, Vol. 4, pp. 244-249.
43. Floorcloths made at the Baltimore Patent Floorcloth Manufactory, 1817, were advertised to last ten to fifteen years, after which they could be restamped. (*American Beacon and Commercial Diary*, Norfolk, 23 Oct. 1817.)
44. Charleston County *Inventories*, 1771-1774, v. 94A-94B.
45. *SCHGM*, Vol. 70, p. 83, note 13.
46. *SCHGM*, Vol. 16, p. 185.
47. George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), p. 98.
48. "The Bull Family of South Carolina," *SCHGM*, Vol. 1, pp. 85-86.
49. Charleston County *Inventories*, 1771-1774, p. 251.
50. Charleston County *Inventories*, 1776-1784, Vol. 100, p. 146.
51. *SCHGM*, Vol. 2, p. 232.
52. Charleston County *Inventories*, 1776-1784, pp. 381-388.
53. *SCHGM*, Vol. 29, p. 43.
54. Charleston County *Inventories*, 1776-1784, pp. 332-334.
55. *SCHGM*, Vol. 29, pp. 14-18.

56. Maurice A. Crouse, ed., "The Letterbook of Peter Manigault, 1763-1773," SCHGM, Vol. 70, p. 79.
57. *Ibid*, pp. 188-189.
58. *Inventory Books, 1772-1778*, South Carolina Archives, 14 Feb. 1774 and 19 March 1774.
59. Hamer, *Henry Laurens*, Vol. 1, p. xix.
60. *Charleston City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, 7 Aug. 1806.
61. *Norfolk American Beacon and Commercial Diary*, 10 May 1816.
62. Feb. 8, 1980 letter from Madeleine Jarry, Inspecteur Principal du Mobilier National et des Manufactures Nationales des Gobelins et de Beauvais, Paris.
63. *The Examiner*, Richmond, 3 April 1801.
64. *Bartgis's Republican Gazette*, Frederick, Md., 29 March 1805.
65. *Tennessee Gazette*, 27 March 1805.
66. *Kentucky Gazette*, 30 Sept. 1816.
67. *American Recorder*, Washington, 29 Jan. 1819.
68. Betty Bright P. Low, "Letters of Josephine Dupont and Margaret Manigault," *Winterthur Portfolio* 9 (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1974), p. 55.
69. *Ibid*, p. 68.
70. *Ibid*, p. 70.
71. Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt* (N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p. 239.

Information for this paper has been drawn primarily from the MESDA research files and Charleston County inventories on microfilm. However, for a general understanding of carpet use in early America, a strong debt must be acknowledged to Mary Goodwin (Carpets, Carpeting, Floor Cloths, Rugs, unpublished manuscript at Colonial Williamsburg, November 7, 1960); Mildred B. Lanier (English and Oriental Carpets at Williamsburg, Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1975); Nina Fletcher Little (Floor Coverings in New England Before 1850, Sturbridge, Mass.: Old Sturbridge Village, 1972); Helene von Rosenstiehl (American Rugs and Carpets, N.Y.: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1978), and Rodris Roth (Floor Coverings in 18th Century America, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1967). The author would also like to mention the receipt of a very helpful letter from Mr. Peter Thornton, of the Victoria and Albert Museum, on the subject of straw matting.

Key Baskets

R. LEWIS WRIGHT

Leather baskets made for storing household keys are among the rarest forms of utilitarian American folk art. Because they were of little or no use to recent generations, most have been discarded. Only rarely have they been illustrated in publications,¹ and there are probably less than twenty examples in museum collections.

Key baskets may have been solely a product of Virginia and North Carolina. Most surviving examples are associated with the vicinity of Richmond, Virginia, and were made in the mid-nineteenth century. Although it has been said that they may have been made as far north as Pennsylvania,² no documented examples of this form are known north of Virginia. The southernmost known extent of their use is in North Carolina (Fig. 1). There are no New England examples of this form known to this author.³

Harris' 1924 *Antiques* article (see Footnote 1) on key baskets described them as a traditional wedding gift in the Richmond area. Illustrated in the study was a leather basket highly decorated by tooling which Mrs. Harris attributed to an inmate of the "slave penitentiary at Richmond." She estimated that it was made between 1840-1850. Her suggestion for the maker seems unfounded, though no other maker has been identified. However, a number of key baskets attributed to this unknown leatherworker have survived in the Richmond area. Similar in design, but each differing in detail, these are characterized by the impressed designs of multiple small figures around the sides of the basket. Imprinted initials (presumably those of the bride



Figure 1. Leather key basket. By an unknown maker, this example descended in the Hamlin family of Roxboro, N.C. HOA $7\frac{3}{8}$ ", LOA $8\frac{1}{2}$ ", WOA $3\frac{1}{2}$ ". Private collection. MESDA Research File S-10,331.

or mistress of the house) are on one end of each basket, and the bottoms were embossed with various motifs. Red leather was used for lining the interior of the basket and the heart-shaped piercing on each side at the base of the handle. Key baskets by this maker are in the collections of the Virginia Historical Society (Fig. 2), the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, and the Lynchburg Museum System (Fig. 3). Others are in private collections (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). The example in the collections of the Lynchburg Museum System (Fig. 3) is of particular interest because something of its provenance is known. The basket has on one end the initials, "L. E. J." It is said to have been a wedding present to Lucy Ellen Burrows (1836-1925), who married Fountaine D. Johnson on January 5, 1858.⁴ The couple initially lived in Culpeper, Virginia, and moved to Lynchburg, Virginia, in 1881.



Figure 2. Leather key basket. Though the maker has not been identified, a number of examples by this maker have been found in the area of Richmond, Va. The initials "L. W. C." are on one end of the basket. HOA 7½", LOA 6½", WOA 4". Collections of the Virginia Historical Society. Photograph by George Nan.

The basket shown in Fig. 5 has the initials "G. F." imprinted on the bottom (Fig. 6). These could be the initials of the maker, though Richmond city directories list no saddle or harness maker with these initials. However, two Richmond boot and shoemakers with these initials were in the area at that time; George Friday lived and worked at his shop on Broad between Fifth and Sixth Streets in 1859-1860, and in 1860 G. Freitag was listed on Front Street between Hughes and Royall Streets.⁵

Key baskets were usually made of cow or pig hide, but the Richmond firm of S. S. Cottrell Co. made some of them of shark



Figure 3. Leather key basket. Maker unknown. The initials "L. E. J." are impressed on one end of the basket. HOA 7¼", LOA 9½", WOA 4¼". Collections of the Lynchburg, Va., Museum System. Photograph by Gene Burnett.

skin.⁶ Several examples decorated by stitching survive and have the legend "S. S. Cottrell Co., Richmond, Va." imprinted on the exterior of the bottom (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8). The Cottrell family operated as harness and saddlemakers in Richmond from before 1850 until 1928.⁷ The firm known as S. S. Cottrell Co. existed from about 1858 until 1887. Prior to the Civil War they were located at 129 Main Street, and after the war they were at 1303 East Main Street.

Two other Richmond makers signed their work. One example, signed by tooling on the bottom, was made by J. H. Dickerson. He is first listed as a harness maker working for J. W. Dennis, 54 Main Street, in 1856. Richmond city directories between 1869-1881 list the firm of J. H. Dickerson and Bro., saddle and harness makers, at 1514-1516 East Franklin Street. Dickerson's name is not listed during the period 1882-1891. From 1892-1902 the firm of J. H. Dickerson and Co., saddle



Figure 4. Leather key basket. With a Richmond provenance, and having similarity to baskets illustrated in Figs. 2, 3, and 5, this basket has the initials "R. F. H." imprinted on both ends. HOA 7¼", LOA 8¼", WOA 5¼". Private collection. Photograph by Dennis McWaters.

and harness makers, was located at 1402 East Main Street.⁸ A mid-nineteenth century tooled key basket, signed by impression on the exterior bottom "P. T. Crump, Richmond, Va.," is also known. The firm of Benjamin T. Crump, harness and saddlemakers, has operated in Richmond from 1895 to the present day. The basket antedates this period, and Richmond city directories do not list P. T. Crump as an individual or as a firm.

Other key baskets from the Richmond area were of relatively simple design (Figs. 9 and 10). The basket shown in Fig. 11 is decorated by fancy stitching, and is said to have been made on the Agee farm in Buckingham County, Virginia, in 1858.⁹ Key baskets were also made in the Shenandoah Valley (Fig. 12 and Fig. 13). The simply tooled basket shown in Figure 13 is of

particular interest because it contains a worn paper label on the interior bottom, "R. H. Ricketts, Manufacturer of Saddles, Harness, etc., Old Saddles Taken in Exchange, Flint Hill, Va." (Fig. 14).



Figure 5. Leather key basket. Maker unknown. With a provenance of Richmond, Va., this example bears the initials "M. J. E." on one end. HOA 8¼", LOA 8", WOA 4¾". Private collection. Photograph by Dennis McWaters.



Figure 6. The decorated bottom of the basket shown in Fig. 5 bears the initials "G. F." These may be the initials of the maker. Photograph by Dennis McWaters.



Figure 7. This key basket, made of shark skin, was made by S. S. Cottrell and Co., Richmond, Va. HOA 6¼", LOA 8½", WOA 3½". Private collection. Photograph by Dennis McWaters.



Figure 8. Bottom of the basket shown in Fig. 7. Photograph by Dennis McWaters.



Figure 9. Leather key basket. Maker unknown. From Richmond, the interior of this example bears remnants of a red felt lining. HOA $5\frac{3}{4}$ ", LOA $6\frac{1}{8}$ ", W/OA $3\frac{3}{4}$ ". Private collection. Photograph by Dennis McWaters.



Figure 10. Leather key basket. Maker unknown. Provenance, Chesterfield County, Va. HOA 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ " , LOA 8" , WOA 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Private collection. Photograph by Dennis McWaters.

The symbolism of giving a key basket to a bride was highly appropriate. From the time of ancient Rome to the present day the presentation of keys of a household to the bride has been a significant event.¹⁰ Harris spoke of the inescapable duty of a mistress of a mid-nineteenth Virginia household ". . . to . . . carry around an incubus of heavy old keys . . ."¹¹ The unknown Richmond maker whose highly tooled baskets are shown in Figs. 2-5 used symbols of long life, prosperity, and happiness such as pentagonal and hexagonal stars, hearts, diamonds, laurel branches, and grains of wheat.¹²

As an art form the leather key basket seems to have originated without European precedent in Virginia, and possibly North Carolina, during the mid-nineteenth century. It was created to provide a convenient means of carrying the multiple

keys of a household, including outbuildings such as kitchens, smokehouses, and icehouses which were characteristic of this area. Keys held by the mistress of a household also locked well-secured furniture forms common to this area including cellarets, sugar chests, and various types of cupboards.

Dr. Wright is a Richmond neurosurgeon with a wide interest in the early arts of Virginia.



Figure 11. Leather key basket. Maker unknown. Provenance, Buckingham County, Va. HOA $7\frac{3}{16}$ " , LOA $7\frac{3}{4}$ " , WOA $3\frac{1}{4}$ ". Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (File "VA MISCL-21").



Figure 12. Leather key basket. Maker unknown. Provenance, Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. HOA 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ " , LOA 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ " , WOA 4". Private collection. Photograph by Dennis McWaters.



Figure 13. Leather key basket. Made by R. H. Ricketts, Flint Hill, Va. HOA 7 1/4", LOA 10", WOA 5 1/4". Private collection. Photograph by William Hooker.

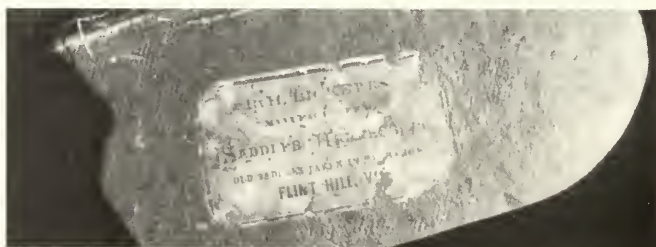


Figure 14. Paper label on the interior of the basket shown in Fig. 13. Photograph by Claude Abron.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Antiques and the Arts Weekly*, June 23, 1978; Harris, Mrs. W. L. "A Southern Wedding Gift." *Antiques*, 5:71, 1924; Morton, Robert. *Southern Antiques and Folk Art* (Birmingham, Ala., Oxmoore House, Inc. 1976).
2. Personal communication, Gordon Crumpler, Colonial Heights, Va. 1980.
3. Personal communication, Brock Jobe, Boston, Mass., 1980; personal communication, Mrs. Nina Fletcher Little, Brookline, Mass., 1980.
4. Archives of the Lynchburg Museum System, Lynchburg, Va.; personal communication, Ms. Patricia A. Piorkowski, Lynchburg, Va., 1981.
5. Richmond City Directories, 1817 to the present. It should be noted that these two names may have represented the same individual, since the German "Freitag" is equivalent to "Friday."
6. Identification by Lemuel Carter, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1980.
7. Richmond City Directories.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Archives of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
10. *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*. Maria Leach, editor (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1972).
11. Harris, "Southern Wedding Gift."
12. *The Oxford English Dictionary. Being a Corrected Re-issue with and Introduction, Supplement, and Bibliography of A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles Founded Mainly on the Materials Collected by The Philological Society*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); Harris, "Southern Wedding Gift."

MESDA seeks manuscripts which treat virtually any facet of southern decorative art for publication in the JOURNAL. The MESDA staff would also like to examine any privately-held primary research material (documents and manuscripts) from the South, and southern newspapers published in 1820 and earlier.

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